

"Classics Illustrated" comic

What is a Classic?

There is no last word on what the Marxist "Classics" are, or might be. Generally, they are the ones that are in use, because they are relevant. Classics are those works which continue to be useful.

In this half-day series, we cannot do a full review of all the Classics. They are not unlimited in number, but they are too many to be dealt with in this way. Therefore we exclude the two greatest classics, The Communist Manifesto and Marx's "Capital". We have dealt with them in other parts of the series, as we have dealt with Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach", "The Critique of the Gotha Programme", Lenin's "April Theses" and "The State and Revolution", as well as "What Is To Be Done" and Rosa Luxemburg's "Reform or Revolution?"

The classics multiply and elaborate the effect of the fundamental or basic works like The Manifesto, and Capital. They take us much more fully into the realm of tactics.

Lenin in his "[The State and Revolution](#)" (a classic, and itself a review of the classics) wrote that in his opinion "[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)", written and published in 1847, is "the first mature work of Marxism". It was certainly the first published mature work of Marxism. It was preceded by The German Ideology, which was not published in full until after Lenin's death.

We will start where Lenin started, with the "Poverty of Philosophy".



[Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#) and his daughters, by [Gustave Courbet](#), 1865

The Poverty of Philosophy

The Poverty of Philosophy, Karl Marx, 1847, excerpts

In Chapter 2 of his 1917 between-two-revolutions work “[The State and Revolution](#)”, V I Lenin notes that “*The first works of mature Marxism — [The Poverty of Philosophy](#) and the [Communist Manifesto](#) — appeared just on the eve of the revolution of 1848.*”

Among other things, “The State and Revolution” was Lenin’s course on The Classics, moving through the works of Marx and Engels and revealing the spine or theme of the entire body of work.

We have already looked at this question. [The German Ideology](#) (which included the [Theses on Feuerbach](#)), was written between 1845 and 1847, but not published in full until 1932, long after Lenin’s death in 1924. These works should therefore also be recognised as the “first works of mature Marxism”.

So we can see a reasonably clear-cut beginning to the “canon” of Marxism, in terms of time and of specific works: the “Theses on Feuerbach”, written in Brussels in early 1845, followed by “The German Ideology”, and then by “The Poverty of Philosophy”, and then by the “Communist Manifesto” in the beginning of 1848. But what is the nature of this beginning, as revealed in these works?

One part of the answer to this question is polemic. This is a kind of argument that proceeds from criticism of an opponent’s ideas expressed in text, which is then carefully examined and dissected. These works are polemical. “The German Ideology” was a polemic against Bruno Bauer and [Max Stirner](#), the latter being an anarchist who had previously published a book called “The Ego and Its Own”. Another anarchist opponent of Marx and Engels in the early 1840s was [Wilhelm Weitling](#), who wrote a book called “Gospel of Poor Sinners”, published in 1847.

The Poverty of Philosophy was started in January 1847 and published the same year. It was a polemic against a third anarchist, [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#), who had written a book called "[The Philosophy of Poverty](#)".

In case we should get too particular about the term "anarchism", it can help to recall what Lenin wrote in Chapter 3 of The State and Revolution, namely that "*anarcho-syndicalism... is merely the twin brother of opportunism.*" The imprecision of anarchism is one of its faults. Its distinction from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois liberalism is not clear. Marx's polemic is directed against these faults, and others.

There was no innocent Garden of Eden for Marxism before it was assailed by anarchists, "ultra-lefts", revisionists, reformists and all sorts of deviationists, *escamoteurs* and demagogues. In fact, there was not even as much as one minute of peace for Marxism before it had to contend with all of these kinds of opponents. Marxism was actually conceived within this very same argument. The argument with the anarchists was itself the creative act. There was no Marxism prior to its polemical fights with anarchism, and Marxism is fated to contend with these same foes in their many variations until the day that class struggle finally ends, and the communist parties disband themselves.

The selected text from The Poverty of Philosophy is from the last pages.

It is not necessary for our present purposes to follow every twist and turn of Marx's argument in Part 3 of The Poverty of Philosophy. Most of it is in any case lucid and clear, although it is sometimes not easy to tell which is Marx's own voice, and which is Marx speaking satirically, in Proudhon's voice.

In the final part, Marx begins by advocating "combination", which is the creation of mass democratic organisations, especially trade unions. He finds the "twin brothers" - the reformist bourgeois economists, and the utopian socialists - both arguing against combination; yet he notes that the more advanced the countries become, the greater is the degree of combination. Association then takes on a political character, says Marx.

In the final page Marx writes:

"An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society... The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of every class... ...there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society... ...the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a struggle of class against class, a struggle which carried to its highest expression is a total revolution."

This is classic Marxism.

The image above is a reproduction of a painting of [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#) made in 1865 by the Realist painter and revolutionary [Gustave Courbet](#). In 1871 Courbet was placed in charge of all art museums by the Paris Commune. After the fall of the Commune, Courbet was punished and exiled to Switzerland, where he died.



1848 in Berlin

1850 Address to the Communist League

Address to the Communist League Central Committee, March 1850, Marx

When history is on the move the changes run all over the place. The job of the communists is invariably to urge history on, and to push all the players, including the bourgeoisie, to play their parts to the utmost extent.

The phrase "permanent revolution" belongs first to Marx (and not to Trotsky). It comes from the March, 1850 Address given by Karl Marx to the Central Committee of the Communist League, of which "permanent revolution" are the last two words. See the attached, or below for a link to a downloadable file of this great document.

"Permanent revolution" only means a qualitative change that will be defended.

It does not mean that the revolution is irreversible.

Nor does it mean that the revolution has to be repeated constantly like the punishment of Sisyphus.

The March, 1850 Address to the Communist League is an internationalist document. At the time, the newly formed communist organisations were active all over Europe, in a time when monarchies were falling and feudalism was on the way out in many countries.

This document needs to be read with care and attention!



Louis Bonaparte's balancing act

The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

In the following cut from “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” it is clear that the proletariat suffered a disaster when it had no allies and was isolated and attacked by all the other classes together and massacred in June of 1848 in Paris. This is the situation that the proletariat must always avoid, and it is one reason why the working class must always have allies. Here is part of Marx’s outline of the events:

“a. May 4 to June 25, 1848. Struggle of all classes against the proletariat. Defeat of the proletariat in the June days.

“b. June 25 to December 10, 1848. Dictatorship of the pure bourgeois republicans. Drafting of the constitution. Proclamation of a state of siege in Paris. The bourgeois dictatorship set aside on December 10 by the election of Bonaparte as President.”

In the “18th Brumaire” the contenders of the Great French Revolution reappear, namely the Aristocracy, the Peasantry (nicknamed the “*Montagne*”), the Bourgeoisie and the working Proletariat. Also described are the serious contradictions within the bourgeois class; the apparently classless, certainly manipulative Bonaparte, who played the four main classes off against each other for more than two decades until he lost the plot; and the “*lumpen proletariat*” of idle adventurers who were Bonaparte’s willing, and paid (with “whisky and sausages”) accomplices.

Juggling the different class interests and playing the different classes against each other is what is now called “Bonapartism”. Louis Bonaparte did it for twenty years. Thabo Mbeki managed for only ten. In both cases the main beneficiary turned out to be the bourgeois class.

Here are four paragraphs taken from the “18th Brumaire”:

“Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent. The state machinery has so strengthened itself vis-a-vis civil society that the Chief of the Society of December 10 [Louis Bonaparte] suffices for its head — an adventurer dropped in from abroad, raised on the shoulders of a drunken soldiery which he bought with whisky and sausages and to which he has to keep throwing more sausages. Hence the low-spirited despair, the feeling of monstrous humiliation and degradation that oppresses the breast of France and makes her gasp. She feels dishonored.

“And yet the state power is not suspended in the air. Bonaparte represented a class, and the most numerous class of French society at that, the small-holding peasants.

“Just as the Bourbons were the dynasty of the big landed property and the Orleans the dynasty of money, so the Bonapartes are the dynasty of the peasants, that is, the French masses. The chosen of the peasantry is not the Bonaparte who submitted to the bourgeois parliament but the Bonaparte who dismissed the bourgeois parliament. For three years the towns had succeeded in falsifying the meaning of the December 10 election and in cheating the peasants out of the restoration of the Empire. The election of December 10, 1848, has been consummated only by the coup d'etat of December 2, 1851.

“The small-holding peasants form an enormous mass whose members live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with each other. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse. The isolation is furthered by France's poor means of communication and the poverty of the peasants. Their field of production, the small holding, permits no division of labor in its cultivation, no application of science, and therefore no multifariousness of development, no diversity of talent, no wealth of social relationships. Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society.

“A small holding, the peasant and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department.

“Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homonymous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes.

“Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class.

“They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power which subordinates society to itself.”

In 2012, does the ANC “subordinate society to itself”? Its opponents think so.



Louis Bonaparte as a bat, balancing Thiers and the Republic

The Civil War in France

The Civil War in France, Chapter 5, The Paris Commune

Lenin's 1917 "[The State and Revolution](#)" is a classic that we will get to later on during this course on "The Classics". What we can say about it now is that in that book Lenin goes through some of the other classics, just as we are doing now. In particular, Lenin devotes a whole chapter to the Paris Commune, basing it on Marx's classic book and our featured Classic, "[The Civil War in France](#)".

Let us defer to Lenin and use some of his work as our main introduction to it.

Early on in his "[Paris Commune](#)" chapter, Lenin refers to another classic, the Manifesto, pointing out that it was modified by Marx and Engels after 1871. This is what Lenin says, while quoting them:

'The last preface to the new German edition of the Communist Manifesto, signed by both its authors, is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the Communist Manifesto "has in some details become out-of-date", and they go on to say:

"... One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'...."[1]

'The authors took the words that are in single quotation marks in this passage from Marx's book, *The Civil War in France*.'

Lenin goes on:

'Marx's idea is that the working class must break up, smash the "ready-made state machinery", and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it.

'On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

"If you look up the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it [Marx's italics--the original is zerbrechen], and this is the precondition for every real people's revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting."

Lenin proceeds:

'Today, [i.e. in 1917] in Britain and America, too, "the precondition for every real people's revolution" is the smashing, the destruction of the "ready-made state machinery" ...

'Secondly, particular attention should be paid to Marx's extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is "the precondition for every real people's revolution". This idea of a "people's revolution" seems strange coming from Marx, so that the Russian Plekhanovites and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be regarded as Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a "slip of the pen" on Marx's part. They have reduced Marxism to such a state of wretchedly liberal distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the antithesis between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution, and even this antithesis they interpret in an utterly lifeless way.

'If we take the revolutions of the 20th century as examples we shall, of course, have to admit that the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions are both bourgeois revolutions. Neither of them, however, is a "people's" revolution, since in neither does the mass of the people, their vast majority, come out actively, independently, with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree. By contrast, although the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-07 displayed no such "brilliant" successes as at the time fell to the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, it was undoubtedly a "real people's" revolution, since the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of their own demands, their attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed.

'In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country on the Continent. A "people's" revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the "people". These two classes are united by the fact that the "bureaucratic-military state machine" oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To smash this machine, to break it up, is truly in the interest of the "people", of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is "the precondition" for a free alliance of the poor peasant and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible.'

The lessons of the Paris Commune are many. Here are some of Marx's own words from our chosen chapter:

"...no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject [emancipation of labour] into their own hands with a will, than uprises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of capital and wages-slavery (the landlord now is but the sleeping partner of the capitalist), as if the capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare. The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization!"

"Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour. But this is communism, "impossible" communism! Why, those member of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system — and they are many — have become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production.

"If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production — what else, gentlemen, would it be but communism, "possible" communism?"

Factual note: What had happened in France was that Louis Bonaparte, the nobody, the returned exile, who juggled the classes and deceived them all, had made himself an "Emperor". But he ran out of options after two decades in power. He decided to make a foolish war on the Prussians, who beat the French and advanced to Versailles, outside Paris. The French government then abandoned Paris like cowards: Hence the formation of the self-governing Paris Commune. In Versailles, a suburb of royal palaces, the Germans (Prussians and others) for the first time agreed among themselves to form a single nation, while at the same time licensing and assisting the defeated French bourgeoisie to destroy their own compatriots in Paris.



Revolution in Paris, France: February 1848

The First International

International Working Mens' Association Inaugural Address, 1864, Marx

The [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 is a deliberately internationalist document. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were deployed to write it by the international [Communist League](#), of which they were members. The League was strongly based among continental workers in London, where the first edition of the Manifesto was printed (in German) while Marx was running a part of it in Brussels, Belgium, Engels was in Germany, and Communist League members were in action in [many other countries](#) including France.

The Manifesto's publication coincided almost exactly with the outbreak of revolution in France, in February of 1848, which quickly spread to many other countries. The final [Chapter IV](#) of the Manifesto says among other things that: "... the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things," and it finishes with the famous slogan "**Working Men of All Countries, Unite!**"

Most of the revolutions of 1848 were aimed at overthrowing feudal monarchies. or in other words **turning kingdoms into republics**, if necessary by the proletariat supporting the bourgeoisie in the anti-monarchy revolution. The content of Marxist internationalism still includes relentless opposition to monarchy, and also class alliance with elements of the national bourgeoisie against Imperialism.

Marx's 1864 Address to the International Working Men's Association ([The First International](#)) was the consequence of his being invited and elected to the leadership of that organisation. It was formed in London in a hall next to where the South African High Commission now stands. Please download and read the Address in the downloadable MS-Word version attached and linked below. Marx had been in exile in London since 26 August 1849 after being banished in quick succession from Belgium, Germany and France. In 1864, Marx's reputation was that of being the foremost internationalist of his time.

The First International survived until shortly after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. The [Second International](#) was established at a gathering in Chur, Switzerland ten years later in 1881, two years before Marx's death in 1883 and fourteen years before Engels' death in 1895. The Second International fostered Lenin, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg among many others. Its collapse in 1914 marked the great division between the opportunists (such as "the renegade" Kautsky) who in the face of imperialist

war folded their internationalism and became cowardly national chauvinists, and on the other hand the true internationalists like Luxemburg and Lenin who opposed the imperialist war. These latter ones, the true internationalists, were also the communists, who established the communist parties that still exist today.

The [Third International](#), also called the [Communist International](#) (or Comintern) was launched in Soviet Russia less than two years after the October Revolution, in 1919, and in 1921 it admitted the Communist Party of South Africa into membership, thus founding the party that is today known as the South African Communist Party, the SACP.

The history of the communists is an unbroken line of internationalism, of which the SACP is an indissoluble part. There is no communism separate from internationalism. The SACP is still internationalist and continues to promote the same relentless anti-monarchical, anti-feudal, anti-colonial, anti-neo-colonial, anti-imperialist cause as before and will do so until the day of continental permanent proletarian revolution arrives in Africa.



On Authority; Political Indifferentism

Engels, On Authority, 1872; Marx, Political Indifferentism, 1873

These are two short pamphlets, one by Engels and one by Marx, one on “Authority” and one on “Indifferentism”, compiled together in one document.

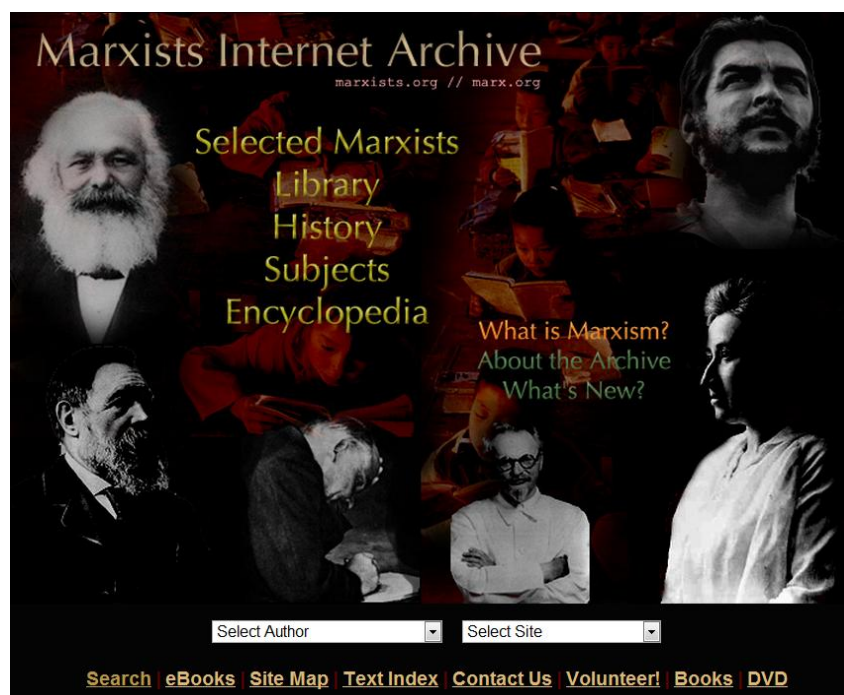
Says Engels: Either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they're talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion; or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the movement of the proletariat. In either case they serve the reactionaries.

This was written in 1872 and published in 1874, in Italy. It is a “classic” because it addresses a familiar argument. The “politically correct” of the day were saying that all forms of “authority” were bad and must be done away with. Engels corrects this “politically correct” error.

Marx, writing in 1873, also for eventual publication in Italy in 1874, addresses what he calls “Political Indifferentism”. This is a very profound lesson of Karl Marx's. What he is saying is that although, under the bourgeois dictatorship, in the bourgeois democracy, whose choices are all bourgeois choices, yet we cannot therefore say that we should have nothing to do with it, and refuse to choose.

On the contrary, we have to study it with more attention than anyone else and make the tactically right choices in the interest of the working class.

In South Africa in the early 21st century, clearly the communists are deeply involved in the politics of the bourgeois state, and Marx would, according to this text, say that such involvement is more than inevitable: It is deliberate and it is right. The communists cannot remain indifferent to what the bourgeoisie is doing.



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Socialism, Utopian and Scientific

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, 1880, Engels, Part 3, Historical Materialism, final pages

“[Socialism, Utopian and Scientific](#)”, by Frederick Engels is a (relatively) short text derived from three chapters of Engels’ larger classic work, “[Anti-Dühring](#)” (which we can therefore reasonably treat as having been covered in this course on “The Classics”).

This text reflects to some extent upon what a “Classic” is. Dealing with the period following the Italian Renaissance, prior to the French Revolution, referred to as “The Enlightenment”, Engels writes:

“We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that this eternal Right found its realization in bourgeois justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contrat Social [Social Contract] of Rousseau, came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the 18th century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch.”

Therefore what were “Classics” in bourgeois philosophy, such as the works of the romantic philosopher [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#), are not necessarily classics for all time. The classics for the purposes of this ten-part course are the Marxist classics, and “Socialism, Utopian and Scientific” is a typical one.

By Utopian, Engels meant imaginary, or ideal, and therefore typical of the early socialists such as Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, and François Fourier. Marx and Engels respected these pioneers but also distinguished themselves critically from them. The [third part of the Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 discusses the differences.

Engels begins “Socialism, Utopian and Scientific” with the [Great French Revolution](#) that started in 1789. From this point on we can meet the class protagonists who allied and clashed from that time on until now, in all possible permutations: alliances holy and unholy, strategic and tactical, marriages of convenience and marriages made in heaven.

These classes were the feudal aristocrats; the peasants; the bourgeoisie; and the proletariat.

This work of Engels’ has the additional benefit of introducing the rudiments of political philosophy, and also of leading our thoughts towards the “democratic bourgeois republic”, which is at one and the same time the highest form of political life before socialism - the prerequisite of concerted proletarian action - and on the other hand is a form of the State that has to be transcended and left behind.

Engels describes the limitation imposed upon the human Subject by the objective circumstances, and also the possibility of transcending such limitations. This is humanism. Humanism says that humans build humanity within the given material world and history.

There is no great need to search for modern summaries of the classics when the masters have themselves provided very good summaries of their own work. Frederick Engels in particular left great summarising, concretising texts, especially towards the end of his friend Karl Marx’s life, and after Marx’s death in 1883.

The September 2010 SACP Discussion Document, called “[Expanding Democratic Public Control over the Mining Sector](#)”, makes good use of “Socialism, Utopian and Scientific” to carry a crucial point about nationalisation: That Marxists have never asserted that state ownership, as such, is an inherently progressive or socialist measure. It quotes Engels:

“the official representative of capitalist society – the state – will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into state property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication – the post office, the telegraphs, the railways.” (Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”, 1880).

Engels was very clear that in such cases, state ownership was NOT about abolishing capitalism.

On the contrary:

“the transformation...into state property, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces... The more it [the bourgeois state] proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers – proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head.” (Engels, *ibid.*)

After this week, the Classics course moves beyond Marx and Engels to include Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Gramsci.

You can find a full, [hyperlinked list of the main works of Marx and Engels](#) on [Marxists Internet Archive](#) (home page reproduced above).



Family, Property and State

Origin of Family, Property and State

Origin of Family, Property and State, Chapter 9, 1884, Engels

Today we feature Chapter 9, the chapter called “Barbarism and Civilisation”, of Engels’ book [“The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State”](#). The Chapter is linked below as an MS-Word download.

“The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State” is a classic of the first rank, both within the field of Marxism, and more widely, as palaeontology.

Lenin relied on it, and referred to it often for the illumination that it gives to the revolutionary question of The State, and to the necessity of the withering away of the State.

But this work of Engels’ is also foundational in Archaeology and Paleoanthropology (i.e. the study of the pre-history of human society), just as Engels’ [“The Condition of the Working Class in England”](#) was foundational to the study of the formation of cities: Urbanism (also called Urban Studies or Town Planning). Engels, who never formally went to a university, is nevertheless more than once counted among the towering historic founders of scholarly disciplines.

Marx had already worked on source material for this project, including on Henry Morgan’s 1877 book called [“Ancient Society”](#). Engels found Marx’s working papers after Marx’s death in 1883, and immediately set to work to prepare a book from them for publication.

The particular contribution of “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” is that it shows the common, interdependent origin of private property and the State, plus the fall of the women into the oppressive condition which they subsequently continued to suffer, and also the institutions of money, writing and law.

The simultaneous revolutionary break in all of these things marks the end of pre-history and the beginning of history, which as Marx and Engels had noted in the [Communist Manifesto](#), was from that point onwards “a history of class struggles”.

The transition from prehistoric communism into class society took place a long time ago in some parts of the world, and much more recently in other parts. In Egypt and in Iraq (Mesopotamia) it may have happened more than five thousand years ago. In most other parts of the world the transition was more recent.

The simultaneous nature of the triple catastrophe (property, state and the downfall of women) may mean that the remedy for all three will likewise have to be simultaneous. The urgent abolition or “withering away” of the State is for that reason a woman’s issue, and the socialist project is a woman’s project, because they are all part of the same complex of oppressions. Communism is a necessity for women.

The reversal of the downfall of the women can only be achieved by the abolition of property and the State. Likewise, the abolition of property and the State cannot be achieved without the conscious restoration of women to their proper place in human society. All three goals have to be achieved together. The three goals are actually the same goal, and the name of it is [communism](#).



The Russian Revolution of 1905

Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution

Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, Selection, 1905, Lenin

The Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) held its founding Congress in **1898** in Minsk, Russia (all nine delegates were arrested). At that time, and in the early 1900s, no distinction was made between “communists” and “social democrats”. Yet the underlying division was already there, as we will see from the Lenin’s **1905** book, “[Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)”.

In **1899** the prominent German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein wrote “Evolutionary Socialism”. Both Rosa Luxemburg (in “Reform and Revolution”, **1900**) and Lenin (in “What is to be Done”, **1902**) came to the defense of the revolutionary path. They opposed Bernstein’s reformism and what Lenin dubbed his “economism”.

In **1900** Lenin founded the magazine *Iskra* (“Spark”).

In **1903** the 2nd RSDLP Congress took place in Brussels and London. It resulted in the split between the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, and the Mensheviks, led by Julius Martov. After the 2nd Congress, control of *Iskra* passed to the Mensheviks (from Issue No. 52) and Lenin thereafter refers to it as “the new *Iskra*”.

Following “Bloody Sunday” (January 22nd **1905**) a revolution against the autocracy of the Tsar broke out in Russia. One consequence was the institution of a commission to create the “Duma”, the limited Russian parliament, which eventually came into existence in **1906**.

The new situation was considered by the Bolsheviks at the **3rd RSDLP Congress in May, 1905**. The Mensheviks were meeting at the same time in a “**Conference**” in Geneva.

Lenin wrote “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution” in **June and July of 1905**, immediately after the Congress and the Conference. This book is to the Third Congress as “[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#)” is to the Second Congress. But it is also different, because the circumstances are different. In the “Two Tactics” Lenin refers to and continuously compares the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks, the Congress with the Conference, and the old *Iskra* with the new *Iskra*.

The two tactics (those of the Bolsheviks and those of the Mensheviks) were both supposed to be attempts at responding to the new circumstances. These are the circumstances of bourgeois democracy, just then being set up for the first time in Russia, and the question was: What should the proletarian revolutionaries do? To understand Lenin's true answer, you must pay close attention.

The circumstances are arguably similar in some respects to South Africa at the present time. Joe Slovo refers to the comparison in his 1988 pamphlet on "[The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution](#)". We may say, with Slovo, that ours is not a bourgeois democratic revolution, it is a National Democratic Revolution. But the question is still: What should the partisans of proletarian revolution be doing in such a period? Studying this revolutionary manual of Lenin's can help us to find answers to this question.

In **1914** most of the national constituents of the Second International opted to support their national governments in the terrible inter-Imperialist slaughter known as the **First World War**. The Bolsheviks and some others, notably some comrades in South Africa, refused, and opposed the war totally. Only after that time did the permanent distinction grow up between the class-collaborator "Social-Democrat" parties on the one hand, and the Communist Parties on the other.

Lenin was consistent. The 1905 book "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" is already a sustained blast against the vacillating sellout liberals, and in favour of decisive revolution led by the proletariat. He finishes up with the resounding rhetorical question: "Dare We Win?" In the particular circumstances of 1905, this also meant "Dare we remove the Tsar and make a republic?"

What is a "class collaborator"? Is class collaboration the same as "class alliance"? Absolutely not! Class collaboration is a servile abdication whereby the representatives of the working class subordinate themselves to the interests of the ruling (capitalist) class. The working class is very familiar with such collaborators.

Class alliance, on the other hand, is the necessary politics of revolution. The working class must be independent and it must be autonomous, but it must also have allies from outside of its ranks. In South Africa such allies can be peasants and small business people, professionals and intellectuals, but not the principal oppressor, which is monopoly capital. Class alliance serves to prevent the isolation of the working class, and serves to split the forces available to the dominant part of the bourgeoisie. Class alliance, as unity-in-action, can also secure vital material gains and tactical victories for the working class.

From 1905 only twelve years had to pass in Russia before the two-revolution year of 1917. Many documents exist from that period that could be included in a larger "classics" collection. We will select only two, and then use our penultimate part for the revolutionary year, and the final part for the post-revolutionary situation.



Rosa Luxemburg

The Mass Strike

The Mass Strike, 1906, Rosa Luxemburg

["The Mass Strike"](#) is a 1906 [Rosa Luxemburg](#) classic, with a message that is similar to Lenin's 1902 ["What is to be Done?"](#)

Rosa Luxemburg, in the third paragraph of her Chapter 1, demolishes the anarchist, syndicalist, workerist, "economist" approach to the Mass Strike thus: *"either the proletariat as a whole are not yet in possession of the powerful organisation and financial resources required, in which case they cannot carry through the general strike; or they are already sufficiently well organised, in which case they do not need the general strike."*

This does not mean that the Mass Strike, or general strike, is ruled out always and forever as a tactic; but only that the Mass Strike tactic must arise necessarily and organically from the circumstances, as Rosa Luxemburg goes on to explain. But then it may come to pass that instead of over-eager anarcho-syndicalists with no subjective or objective basis, the trade unions may be dominated by over-cautious reformists. Rosa Luxemburg records that the German trade union movement was approaching a two million membership, roughly the same as COSATU in South Africa today, but it was reluctant to move.

Rosa Luxemburg describes the 1906 problematic of Germany thus: *"The German labour movement... assumes the peculiar form of a double pyramid whose base and body consist of one solid mass but whose apexes are wide apart... To desire the unity of these through the union of the party executive and the general commission is to desire to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greater and the crossing more difficult. Not above, amongst the heads of the leading directing organisations and in their federative alliance, but below, amongst the organised proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity of the labour movement."* [last page of "The Mass Strike" compilation, linked below].

This argument supports the SACP tactic of developing Voting District Branches, so that the “real unity” of the South African National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance can be structurally put into effect “below” – at local level – between its constituent parts: ANC, SACP, COSATU and SANCO.

*“The plan of undertaking mass strikes as a serious political class action with organised workers only is absolutely hopeless. If the mass strike, or rather, mass strikes, and the mass struggle are to be successful they must become a real people’s movement, that is, the widest sections of the proletariat must be drawn into the fight... Here **the organisation does not supply the troops of the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organisation.***

“... it is not permissible to visualise the class movement of the proletariat as a movement of the organised minority.

“...the sections which are today unorganised and backward will, in the struggle, prove themselves the most radical, the most impetuous element, and not one that will have to be dragged along...

“If we now leave the pedantic scheme of demonstrative mass strikes artificially brought about by order of parties and trade unions, and turn to the living picture of a peoples’ movement arising with elementary energy, from the culmination of class antagonisms and the political situation—a movement which passes, politically as well as economically, into mass struggles and mass strikes—it becomes obvious that the task of social democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but, first and foremost, in the political leadership of the whole movement.”

Luxemburg is saying that the political structure must lead. The trade union movement cannot lead the revolution.

Try [this link](#) if you wish to access a linked list of further works by Rosa Luxemburg, on [MIA](#).



Bukharin and Trotsky

Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder

Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder (Redaction), 1920, Lenin

Lenin's "[Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder](#)" is a classic book that was written as advice to the proletarian parties in bourgeois-democratic countries.

It is not the same as Lenin's 1918 "['Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality](#)", which was a correction to the "Left Communists" among the Russian revolutionaries themselves, including Bukharin the "doctrinairist" who by 1920 had published, with Preobrazhensky, the pedantic "[ABC of Communism](#)". Lenin was meanwhile taking an opposite tack, and opposing "Left Wing Communism" with the classic book we are looking at today, also published in 1920, one month before the opening of the crucial 2nd Congress of the Communist International.

Our downloadable selection includes the chapters listed here in bold. All of these chapter-headings are hyperlinked to the Marxists Internet Archive, where you can read the entire book.

Contents:

1. [**In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution**](#)
2. [**An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success**](#)
3. [The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism](#)
4. [The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength, and Become Steeled](#)
5. ["Left-Wing" Communism in Germany. the Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses](#)
6. [Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?](#)
7. [**Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?**](#)
8. [No Compromises?](#)
9. ["Left-Wing" Communism in Great Britain](#)
10. [**Several Conclusions**](#)
11. [Appendix](#)

In his **Conclusion**, Lenin begins with two very confident paragraphs summing up the work that he had been intimately involved in as a vanguard cadre:

“The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 revealed a highly original turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries, the strike movement attained a scope and power unprecedented anywhere in the world. In the first month of 1905 alone, the number of strikers was ten times the annual average for the previous decade (1895-1904); from January to October 1905, strikes grew all the time and reached enormous proportions. Under the influence of a number of unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show the world, not only the growth, by leaps and bounds, of the independent activity of the oppressed masses in time of revolution (this had occurred in all great revolutions), but also that the significance of the proletariat is infinitely greater than its proportion in the total population; it showed a combination of the economic strike and the political strike, with the latter developing into an armed uprising, and the birth of the Soviets, a new form of mass struggle and mass organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism.

“The revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the all-round development of the Soviets on a nation-wide scale and to their victory in the proletarian socialist revolution. In less than two years, the international character of the Soviets, the spread of this form of struggle and organisation to the world working-class movement and the historical mission of the Soviets as the grave-digger, heir and successor of bourgeois parliamentarianism and of bourgeois democracy in general, all became clear.”

In **Chapter 2**, Lenin stresses the necessity of having a disciplined vanguard part, and says:

“As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the entire period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.”

In chapters 3 and 4, which are not in our compilation, but which can be read on the Internet, Lenin covers some of the experiences and the controversies that formed the Bolshevik party on a “granite foundation of theory”. We have covered some of this ground in our examination of previous Classics.

In the body of the book, Lenin definitely advises the Communists to work within, and not to boycott, both reactionary trade unions, and Parliaments. Lenin seems to be saying that it is the “granite foundation of theory” that gives the vanguard party the certainty and the confidence that enables it “with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics,” or in other words, to be able to manoeuvre. And without the ability to manoeuvre, there can be no thought of victory. All “doctrinairism” that inhibits manoeuvre is dangerous.

Lenin’s final two paragraphs of the book are as follows:

*“The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working-class movement and social development in general along the straightest and shortest road to the victory of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world-wide scale. That is an incontestable truth. **But it is enough to take one little step farther**—a step that might seem to be in the same direction—**and truth turns into error.** We have only to say, as the German and British Left Communists do, that we recognise only one road, only the direct road, and that we will not permit tacking, conciliatory manoeuvres, or compromising—and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused and is causing, very grave prejudices to communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognising only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and*

sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms to learn how, with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to any such change that does not come from our class or from our efforts.

“World revolution has been so powerfully stimulated and accelerated by the horrors, vileness and abominations of the world imperialist war and by the hopelessness of the situation created by it, this revolution is developing in scope and depth with such splendid rapidity, with such a wonderful variety of changing forms, with such an instructive practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every reason to hope for a rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of "Left-wing" communism.”

The Classics, Part 10c



[Antonio Gramsci, 1891-1937](#)

Some Aspects of the Southern Question

Some Aspects of the Southern Question, 1926, Gramsci

It is a mistake to treat Antonio Gramsci's contribution to political thought as substantially separated in time, or in content, from that of Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and the other revolutionary internationalists who were Gramsci's classic contemporaries.

Gramsci was in Moscow in 1922 and 1923 and met and married his wife there. As a representative of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), he was familiar with the workings of the Comintern. Lenin died in 1924. Gramsci was imprisoned by the Italian fascists in November, 1926, and was not released until just before his death, eleven years later, in 1937.

The great revival in his reputation came with the publishing of Gramsci's "Prison Diaries" not long after the 1945 defeat of fascism in Europe. But the problem with these diaries is that they are voluminous,

and were not edited by the author for publication. Hence there have been disputes and rival claims as to what Gramsci stood for, and about what his precise contribution to classical political theory was.

There is a [Gramsci Archive here](#), on MIA. The 1926 document "[Some Aspects of the Southern Question](#)" is the last that Gramsci wrote before his incarceration. Although nominally unfinished, yet it is certainly a classic, and it has great relevance to the National Democratic Revolution, whether in South Africa or elsewhere. In the beginning of its third paragraph, Gramsci says:

"The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies..."

Northern Italy, where there are many great cities including Turin, home of the giant Fiat company, was as "developed" as France, Germany and England were in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But south of Rome, and on the large Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily, the people lived very differently. In many ways the situation resembled the "Colonialism of a Special Type" that was maturing in South Africa in the same period, and which lasted until the South African democratic breakthrough of the 1990s. Colonised and colonisers were present in the same territory.

The Italian Southerners were even subjected to racial contempt, such that, as Gramsci records: *"It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie: the South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny..."* and so on.

As a communist, Gramsci advocated *"the political alliance between Northern workers and Southern peasants, to oust the bourgeoisie from State power."* But he follows this bare formulation with many fascinating incidences and details about the class structure and class dynamics of Italy at the time and during the preceding three decades, which included the first world war and the subsequent rise of Mussolini's fascists. Gramsci accompanies these narratives with an exceptional sensitivity towards the role of intellectuals, whom he comes close to treating as a distinct class.

Gramsci writes: *"Intellectuals develop slowly, far more slowly than any other social group, by their very nature and historical function. **They represent the entire cultural tradition of a people, seeking to resume and synthesize all of its history.** This can be said especially of the old type of intellectual: the intellectual born on the peasant terrain. To think it possible that such intellectuals, en masse, can break with the entire past and situate themselves totally upon the terrain of a new ideology, is absurd. It is absurd for the mass of intellectuals, and perhaps it is also absurd for very many intellectuals taken individually as well - notwithstanding all the honourable efforts which they make and want to make."*

Yet Gramsci regards such an intellectual break as crucial, saying: *"This is gigantic and difficult, but precisely worthy of every sacrifice on the part of those intellectuals - from North and South - who have understood that only two social forces are essentially national and bearers of the future: the proletariat and the peasants."*

It is fitting that the last of the classics in our ten-part series on "The Classics" includes such words as these from Gramsci, reminding us that for as much as the "classics" provide us with a foundation, yet there is "gigantic and difficult" intellectual work still ahead, so that we should never treat our classics as dogma, and their authors as eternal authorities. To do so would be to betray them.